



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service (EAS)

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

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Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ **Do employees ever refer themselves to the Employee Advisory Service (EAS), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), for help with alcoholism, or are denial and the nature of the illness such that an organization will face an eventual crisis or incident that requires a supervisor referral?**

Fear of job loss or a crisis at work that prompts a supervisor referral isn't the only ways employees get help for alcoholism or drug addiction. Other events in the addicted employee's life outside work can, and do, lead to self-referrals to the EAP. As addiction worsens, performance problems may emerge, but personal problems outside of the workplace have usually existed for a longer period of time. These may include marital conflict, financial and legal problems, or family problems, among others. A crisis associated with these problems may prompt a self-referral. The degree to which the EAP is promoted as confidential, and the extent to which employees feel confident that they will not incur negative repercussions for admitting to personal problems and using the EAP, directly influence whether employees with addiction problems will self-refer.

■ **My employee's wages have been garnished, but her job performance is fine. Obviously she has financial problems, but I don't think it's my business. Should I refer her to the EAP? I don't want to accuse her of not managing her affairs properly.**

If you have been informed by your organization of the garnishment, a supervisor referral to the EAP would be appropriate. Garnishments involve paperwork, consumption of staff time, and are a measurable drain on the organization. A garnishment may not be the result of an employee's misbehavior, so you must not be judgmental. The garnishment may be the result of a legal outcome over which the employee had little or no control. A supervisor referral alone or mention of the EAP does not imply a judgment about the cause of the garnishment. Certainly, continued financial problems can be an issue of concern for the employer, and a reminder that the EAP is available to help the employee with financial or personal issues is therefore a good move. The degree to which this problem recurs may influence how quickly the organization intervenes. Coordinate your plan of action with management and/or your human resources representative.

■ **What is "on-the-job absenteeism" when the term is used to describe the behavior of a troubled employee?**

On-the-job absenteeism describes the inability of a troubled employee to respond adequately to the demands of the job because of personal problems that cause distraction and absentmindedness, or complete absence from the workplace or position, despite being officially present, or earlier seen at work. Lack of attention causing diminished capacity to respond to important key elements of the position are also sometimes

considered on-the-job absenteeism. If on-the-job absenteeism exists, be sure to include it in your documentation when making a supervisor referral to the EAP. It has significant importance in the EAP assessment interview, can give the EA professional important clues, and can prompt key questions that point to the nature of personal problems affecting an employee.

■ **My agency fully endorses the EAP, and I believe all supervisors and managers do, too. Still, I think many of us have unacknowledged biases against employees who admit to personal problems. How can supervisors change these biases?**

Biases may exist, but they do not have to interfere with management decisions and supervisory practices. Avoid acting on them by recognizing that you are in control of what you say and do. You will soon acquire an affirming attitude toward employees who step forward to tackle personal problems. Examine whether unwritten “laws” exist about how employees with personal problems are treated with regard to promotions, raises, discipline, and rewards. Failure to take this step will send the message that there is little to be gained in recognizing personal problems and using the EAP. Also avoid sending the message—in small and subtle ways—that employees with personal problems are not in the organization’s good graces and that they will never achieve the success they might have had if they didn’t seek help from the EAP.

■ **My employee and I are not getting along, but maybe it’s not her fault. Maybe I am too overbearing and this causes problems. Some say I am too controlling, but how can I tell for sure? What behaviors would indicate that I need to “let go” a little bit?**

Give yourself a hand for being willing to examine your supervisory practices and discover what improvements will make you a more effective and balanced supervisor. To determine if you are “over-supervising,” ask yourself whether you too often tell your employee how to handle the details of her work. After delegating assignments, do you feel the irresistible urge to take them back the moment your employee runs into a problem? Do you continually provide “one last piece of advice” because of fear that the end product of an assignment won’t be exactly as you envision it? After delegating an assignment, do you too frequently check to see “how it’s going?” When your employee runs into a problem, do you rarely ask, “What do you think you should do?” If you struggle with making the changes you want in your supervision style, consider talking to the EAP. Remember— the EAP is for you, too!

NOTES:

Visit EAS on our website at:
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

